

Commissioner's Weekly Wrap Up

DCS Communications Office

July 9, 2004

This Week In Central Office

Tuesday, July 6

Central Office staff surprised Commissioner Miller with a "Thank You" party on the 7th floor of the Cordell Hull Building in Nashville!

Thank you to all who attended and shared your kind words of encouragement with the Commissioner!

The Week Ahead

Tuesday, July 13

Commissioner Miller will visit the Nashville Transition Center.

Staff Contact: Carla.aaron@state.tn.us

Wednesday, July 14

Commissioner Miller will visit the Memphis Child Advocacy Center, Peabody and Memphis Group Home in Shelby County.

Staff Contact: Carla.aaron@state.tn.us

Please Send Us Your July Events!

When submitting your **July** events for posting on the Internet calendar, please remember to include the following information:

- ✓ County and region
- ✓ Name and phone number of MAIN contact person
- ✓ Time, Date, Location and Purpose of event

Please send your events to Rick.H.Mullins@state.tn.us

REGIONAL KUDOS: For a Job Well Done!

At this month's Regional Administrator meeting, the RA's were asked by Commissioner Miller to share an act, plan or ongoing course of action from their region that he/she deems successful. The following list reflects each RA's selection:



Knox

Currently implementing database management to improve outcomes and staff performance.

Upper Cumberland

Currently increasing the use of relative placements for many of their children.

Southeast

Currently designating one team coordinator for CPS for the entire region, which provides consistency in decision-making and supervision.

Northwest

Working to reduce the backlog of CPS cases quickly, and improve the response time of CPS investigations.

Hamilton

Working to deliver a consistent training component to teach new employees and to enhance the skills of current staff.

South Central

Currently promoting teamwork and ensuring everyone is sharing information.

Southwest

Consistently using data to manage, which has resulted in a decrease of children in custody.

Mid-Cumberland

Currently implementing the Family-to-Family program in Sumner County and demonstrating the impact this program can have with families.

Davidson

Currently implementing a CPS training unit for incoming case managers to complete before being assigned to a permanent unit.

Northeast

Facilitating child and family team meetings in CPS investigations prior to a child entering custody, which has delayed or eliminated the need for removal in some circumstances.

East

Consistently working to significantly increase the number of adoptions and build/rebuild community relationships.

Shelby

Continues to rebuild the CPS program and is focused on recruiting staff that have a true desire to conduct CPS investigations.

A Few Lessons from John Mattingly and Family to Family

This week's essay comes to us from DCS Executive Director of Permanency Elizabeth Black:

Family to Family founder and Annie E. Casey community partner John Mattingly has been given the responsibility of leading New York City's Administration for Families, Children and Adults. In his press conference this week he is quoted as saying, "It is my commitment to you today--and to the thousands of children, young people, and families affected by this system--that we will do better. This City has the right to expect its child welfare, child-care, and Head Start programs to be the best in the country, and that's what we intend to accomplish in the coming years.

Taking the liberty to speak for those of us involved in Tennessee's public child welfare system, we share this same belief that Tennessee's children, young people, and families affected by our system have a right to expect that we will have the best public child welfare system in the country as well as this same commitment for improvement.

In light of this week's announcement and in recognition that John's direct involvement in Tennessee will be shifting, I thought I would share some of the lessons that I've learned over the past three years from John Mattingly and through the implementation of Family to Family in Tennessee.

Lesson One: Understand and Embrace Core Values

It has been helpful to have a core set of values and principles guiding our work in Family to Family.

These values recognizing that children do best when living in strong families, families do best when living in strong communities, and public child welfare agencies work best when partnering with children and the communities help to provide an overarching vision for our Family to Family sites.

Lesson Two: Define Outcome Measures for Children

It has been helpful to have a clear set of outcomes to measure success.

If we are defining success as a Department, not by how hard we work or by how sincere our motives are, but rather by whether we are achieving good outcomes for children, a strong Commissioner, Regional Administrator, CSA Executive Director, or Private Provider Executive Director has been defined as one who is able to improve outcomes for children.

Lesson Three: Define Strategies

It has been helpful to focus on a small, core set of strategies to improve outcomes for children in the Family to Family sites.

Family to Family focuses on four (4) core strategies to improve outcomes for children. Each site focuses on recruitment and retention of foster parents, building community partnerships, engaging family and community members in critical decisions, and evaluating progress using data.

Lesson Four: Build Regional Capacity

It has been helpful to place particular emphasis on building regional expertise in the areas of recruitment and retention of foster and adoptive parents, engaging family and community members in decision-making, and using data to inform policy and practice.

Lesson Five: Define a Clear Process for Measuring and Supporting Progress

It has been helpful to define a clear process for measuring and supporting progress that has focused on regional authority and responsibility.

Through the establishment of clear outcome and process measures and a quarterly assessment process, we have learned much about measuring and supporting regional progress.

Lesson Six: Be Gentle

It has been helpful to learn about being gentle in our efforts to improve outcomes for children.

This selection from Marilyn McIntyre may best capture this lesson. "In playing tennis, you don't have to hit the ball hard to win, you just have to place the ball well. Just choose your words carefully, and place them well. Accuracy is more important than power. Gentleness has been sentimentalized and oversimplified to mean mild, bland, innocuous and

even reticent. The person we describe as gentle seems often to be the one who does not make trouble, hurt feelings or do much of anything with vigor and conviction. But gentleness has more to do with vigor, conviction and knowing how to make trouble than we commonly think. It is as related to clarity as it is to caring. It has more to do with discernment than it does with deference."

Every one of us in the public child welfare community must understand the outcomes that define our success, the core strategies that we will be using to improve outcomes for children, the process to manage and utilize data, the structure that brings together central office, regional staff persons, resource parents, community leaders and private providers to periodically review progress, define next steps, and define assistance that is needed. We must be gentle with ourselves, our partners in the very important work and the children, youth and families we serve.

Through the leadership of Commissioner Miller and the implementation of our Practice Model, I believe we are moving in this direction.

Elizabeth Black
Elizabeth.black@state.tn.us



No army can withstand the strength of an idea whose time has come.

Victor Hugo

The most fertile soil does not necessarily produce the most abundant harvest. It is the use we make of our faculties which renders them valuable.

Thomas W. Higginson

How desperately difficult it is to be honest with oneself. It is much easier to be honest with other people.

Edward F. Benson

Time is the coin you have in life. It is the only coin you have, and only you can determine how it will be spent. Be careful lest you let other people spend it for you.

Carl Sandburg

Here is the test to find whether your mission on Earth is finished: if you're alive, it isn't.

Richard Bach

In three words I can sum up everything I've learned about life: it goes on.

Robert Frost
